

学校编码:10384

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学 位 论 文

The Cultural Illustrative Examples in General Bilingual Dictionaries

普通双语词典中的文化例证

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申 请 学 位 级 别: 硕 士

专 业 名 称: 英 语 语 言 文 学

论 文 提 交 日 期: 2000 年 5 月

论 文 答 辩 日 期: 2000 年 月

学 位 授 予 单 位: 厦 门 大 学

学 位 授 予 日 期: 2000 年 月 日

答 辩 委 员 会 主 席: _____

评 阅 人: _____

二 000 年 五 月

**The Cultural Illustrative Examples in general Bilingual
Dictionaries**
普通双语词典中的文化例证
(Synopsis)

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The traditional general bilingual dictionary needs more cultural information in order to meet their readers' needs in either decoding or encoding. The thesis is intended to solve the problem of writing cultural illustrative examples in general bilingual dictionaries within the narrow scope the English-Chinese dictionaries, in four chapters.

In Chapter One, the relationship between culture, language and general bilingual dictionaries is presented in detail. It is divided into three parts: the definitions of culture; cultural elements; language, thought and culture consisting of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the cognitive hypothesis, the view of three worlds and the dialectical relationship between culture, language and general bilingual dictionaries.

Chapter Two tries to answer two questions: what kind of cultural information should be conveyed in the illustrative examples in a general bilingual dictionary? And what principles should be followed in writing these examples? It is impossible to include all cultural information in a general bilingual dictionary like a specialized culture dictionary or an encyclopedic dictionary, cultural information presented in a general bilingual dictionary should be closely related to the language described: cultural-bound words; culturally associated words; additive meanings; pragmatic information and encyclopedic information. And then the study is directed to the methods of adding cultural information and the nine functions of cultural examples in a general bilingual dictionary: to clarify cultural meaning in a context; to supply typical cultural contexts; to transmit cultural information; to supply different pragmatic information; to offer typical cultural collocations; to convey related information; to provide translation examples; to present emotional information and to supply stylistic information. The next section is devoted to the detailed

discussion of principles that should be observed by lexicographers when writing cultural examples in general bilingual lexicography.

Chapter Three concentrates on the type and the place of cultural illustrative examples in a general bilingual dictionary. The type of cultural examples depends heavily on the type, the purpose and the scale of a general bilingual dictionary and the dividing criteria. For the limit of space, the thesis only focuses on the study of the main types in terms of linguistic structure and the nature of cultural examples. And at the end of the chapter, the place of cultural examples is studied.

The last chapter is concerned about the detailed discussion of principal methods of translating cultural examples. The methods in writing the counterparts of the original cultural examples in the target language is greatly influenced by the type, the purpose of the general bilingual dictionary in question and the importance of the cultural information in the source language. Different methods can be employed in the translation according to different needs and requirements.

Key Words: cultural illustrative examples, general bilingual dictionaries.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 0.1. THE NECESSITY OF WRITING THE THESIS | 6 |
| 0.2. THE SCOPE OF THE THESIS | 6 |
| CHAPTER ONE | |
| CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND GENERAL BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES | 9 |
| 1.1. <i>The Definition of Culture</i> | 9 |
| 1.2. <i>Cultural Elements</i> | 12 |
| 1.3. <i>Language, Thought and Culture</i> | 13 |
| 1.3.1. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis | 13 |
| 1.3.2. The Cognitive Hypothesis | 13 |
| 1.3.3. The Three-World View | 14 |
| 1.3.4. Language and Culture: a dialectical relationship | 14 |
| 1.3.5. Culture, Language and General Bilingual Dictionaries | 17 |
| CHAPTER TWO | |
| CULTURAL ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES IN GENERAL BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES | 19 |
| 2.1. <i>Cultural Information</i> | 19 |
| 2.2. <i>Methods of Adding Cultural Information</i> | 20 |
| 2.3. <i>Functions of Cultural Illustrative Examples</i> | 20 |
| 2.4. <i>Principles of Adding Cultural Illustrative Examples</i> | 26 |
| 2.4.1. The System Principle | 26 |
| 2.4.2. The User-Friendliness Principle | 27 |
| 2.4.4. The Scientificness Principle | 29 |
| 2.4.5. The Informativeness Principle | 30 |
| 2.4.6. The Typicalness Principle | 30 |
| CHAPTER THREE | |
| THE TYPE AND THE PLACE OF CULTURAL ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES IN GENERAL BILINGUAL DICTIONARIES | 31 |
| 3.1. <i>Main Linguistic Types</i> | 32 |
| 3.1.1. Phrases | 32 |
| 3.1.2. Sentences | 34 |
| 3.1.3. Paragraph Fragments | 34 |
| 3.1.4. Texts | 35 |
| 3.2. <i>Main Informative Types</i> | 36 |
| 3.3. <i>The Arrangement of Cultural Illustrative Examples</i> | 40 |
| 3.3.1. General Principles for Arranging Cultural Examples | 40 |
| 3.3.2. The Place of Cultural Illustrative Examples | 41 |

CHAPTER FOUR

| | |
|---|-----------|
| THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES | 44 |
| 4.1. <i>Introduction</i> | 44 |
| 4.2. <i>The Determining Factors of Translating Cultural Illustrative Examples</i> | 45 |
| 4.3. <i>The Main Translation Methods</i> | 47 |
| 4.3.1. Equivalence | 48 |
| 4.3.2. Transliteration | 49 |
| 4.3.3. Correspondence | 50 |
| 4.3.4. Explanation | 51 |
| 4.3.5. Additional Translation | 52 |
| 4.3.6. Literal Transference | 53 |
| 4.3.7. Synthetic Translation | 54 |
| CONCLUSION | 52 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 53 |

Introduction

0.1. The Necessity of Writing This Thesis

“What is described in a dictionary is thus linguistic units, not phenomena in the world outside the language. But that is not to say that a dictionary which is concerned with the language cannot include information about the world. On the contrary, such a dictionary must often appeal to the user’s knowledge of the world in order to clarify the information given about the language.” (Svensen, 1993: 3) However, in the traditional general bilingual lexicography, lexicographers attach great importance to the linguistic information, particularly the semantic category, and they pay little attention to the cultural information, therefore this practice leads to some semantic loss. In recent years, lexicographers have recognized this problem and embarked on trying to solve it in many ways, “lexicographers should be encouraged to ‘stretch’ language by supplying supplementary information in the form of glosses, explanations and definitions, pictures, illustrations and charts.” (Mary Snell-Hornby, 1989: 211). However, the work is still in the experimental stage and there is the necessity of further study in the field. Therefore, this thesis is intended to make a detailed study of the cultural illustrative examples in the general bilingual dictionary (in fact it narrows down to the general E-C/C-E dictionary) in four chapters.

0.2. The Scope of This Thesis

Chapter one devotes to the relationship among culture, language and general bilingual dictionaries. First of all, a brief survey is made of the definitions of culture in the semantic and historical perspectives. Depending on the result of cultural studies, this writer presents his own definition “culture is a historical transmitted system of human products which is unique and salient to a particular human community” and gives a detailed account of its distinctive features. Then the chapter comes to its main topic the dialectical relationship among culture, language and general bilingual dictionaries. Culture and language are interdependent and inseparable. On the one hand, culture is a multifaceted system

consisting of many elements including language, on the other hand, language plays an active role in cultural activities, and it reflects, spreads and stores culture in a certain sense. General bilingual dictionaries with the main task of finding equivalents in the target language to the headwords in the source language are certainly related to language and culture. General bilingual dictionaries are in fact the result of the scientific study of linguistic and cultural comparison.

Chapter two centers on the study of cultural illustrative examples in general bilingual dictionaries. It mainly solves three problems: what kind of cultural information should be included in a general bilingual dictionary? What principles should be observed when treating cultural information in the illustrative examples in the general bilingual dictionary? And what functions do cultural illustrative examples perform? It is impossible for a general bilingual dictionary to include any kind of cultural information, the writer believes a general bilingual dictionary should include the cultural information closely related to the language. The treatment of the cultural information in a general bilingual dictionary should cover culture-bound words, culturally associated words and additive meaning (including the stylistic meaning, the figurative meaning, the affective meaning, the pragmatic meaning and the encyclopedic meaning). Then this thesis moves to the discussion of the functions performed by the cultural illustrative examples in a general bilingual dictionary and the main principles lexicographers should observe in writing the cultural illustrative examples in a general bilingual dictionary.

Chapter three is concerned about the study of the type and the place of cultural illustrative examples in general bilingual dictionaries. The type of cultural examples depends on the type, the purpose and the scale of a bilingual dictionary and. The type of cultural illustrative examples varies with different criteria. For the limit of the space, a detailed study is only made of the types of cultural examples within the range of the structure of linguistic presentation and the nature of cultural information in the examples and the main principles and places of arranging cultural examples in a general bilingual dictionary.

After a comprehensive study of the above problems, the thesis comes to the other aspect of cultural illustrative examples in a general bilingual

dictionary the determining factors and main methods of translating cultural examples. Cultural examples in general bilingual dictionaries include both the examples written in the source language and their counterparts in the target language. What kind of cultural information should be conveyed depends on the type, the purpose of the general bilingual dictionary and the readers for whom the bilingual dictionary is written and the degree of the importance of the cultural information in the source language and the target language. The last part of the thesis is intended to the brief discussion of seven methods of translating cultural illustrative examples.

In brief, the focal point of the thesis is to make a detailed study of cultural illustrative examples in the general bilingual dictionary and to arouse lexicographers' consciousness of avoiding the semantic loss and improving the bilingual dictionary.

Chapter One

Culture, language and General Bilingual Dictionaries

1.1. The Definition of Culture

From its etymological and semantic perspectives, the concept “culture” in English and German originates from Latin “cultura” meaning “cultivation”, “tilling”, “growing plants and raising animals”, “fineness of feelings, thoughts, tastes, or manners” and “the development of the mind or body by education or training”(OED). And in the Middle Ages, culture began to divide into material culture and spiritual culture (referring to religion only).

In Chinese, the term 文化(culture) consists of 文 and 化, derived from *The Book of Changes* (Yijing) “观乎天文以察时变，观乎人文以化成天下”，it refers to everything human beings produce in the world.

In the 19th century, the term culture was commonly used as a synonym for civilization, particularly in the western countries. It was generally believed that all people pass through developmental stages, beginning with “savagery”, progressing into “barbarism”, and culminating in “civilization”. It is obvious that people in the 19th century confused the two concepts—culture and civilization: Only as far as time is concerned, we know that culture came into being simultaneously with human society and is much earlier than civilization (More information can be obtained from our later definition). Civilization, material or spiritual, is only the advanced stage in the development of culture and appeared much later than culture.

From the 19th century on, people spared no efforts in their study of culture, they defined culture by starting from their own points of view and confined it to their own fields. This process lasted a long time. For example, Harry Hoiyer wrote:

Cultural anthropologists, during the last twenty-five years, have gradually moved from an atomistic definition of culture, describing it as a more or less haphazard collection of traits, to one that emphasizes pattern and configuration. Kluchhohn and Kelly perhaps best express this modern concept of culture when they define it as “all those historically created designs for living explicit and implicit, rational, irrational and

non-rational, which exist at any given time has potential guides for the behavior of men.” Tracts, elements, or, better, patterns of culture in this definition are organized or structured into a system or set of systems, which because it is historically created, is therefor open and subject to constant change. (Hoijer, 1953: 554)

Edward Sapir, an American anthropologist and linguist, stated that “ All cultural behavior is patterned.” (Edward Sapir, 1949: 546). Robert Lado assumed that culture is synonymous with the “ways of a people”. (Robert Lado, 1957: 110)

Only recently has recognition been given to the study of multiple cultures without imposing the belief that culture was something in a narrow scope. Prosser (1978), for example, defines culture as the traditions, customs, norms, beliefs, values and thought patterning passed down from generation to generation. Collier and Thomas (1988) define culture as a historically transmitted system of symbols and norms used by any symbol system that is bounded and salient to individuals.

From the brief survey of the main definitions in the history of culture study, we can see that the study of culture is becoming more and more complete. The definition given by Collier and Thomas is fuller than those given by Edward Sapir, Robert Lado and Prosser. The definitions given by Sapir and Lado are too abstract and only point out that culture is patterned or unique to human behavior. Prosser only emphasized the main cultural elements and the historical transmission of culture. The definition given by Collier and Thomas includes features of culture. (1) historical transmission; (2) a system; (3) bounded and salient to individuals.

Now, it is time for us to give our definition, we define culture as a historical transmitted system of human products which is unique and salient to a particular human community. Here, “ culture” refers to the following:

(1) Culture is historical. As we have mentioned above, culture has a history as long as human society, a closed culture goes through the stages of beginning, growth, culmination and declining, while an open culture is in the process of continuous development. A symbol created by human society must last a long period before it finds its way into a culture, in other words, it should be passed from generation to generation. Culture is

subject to constant change in human history.

(2) Culture is transmitted. Members living in a particular culture obtain cultural knowledge by learning from others in a conscious, yet mainly unconscious way over the course of generations. Children are taught what is good or evil, what is truth, and what they can do and what they can not do. Human beings are not born cultural, but are taught cultural. Cultures are inherited and transmitted from one generation to another in a cultural community or an intercultural community.

(3) Culture is a system. Up to now, about 300 definitions (Hu Wenzhong, 199: 29) have been given to culture in numerous ways. All of them never forget to emphasize culture's multifaceted nature. In fact, culture is a multifaceted patterned system consisting of such elements as language, religion, philosophy, social relationships, norms, values, economy, etc, in orderly and structured patterns. None of these elements is separated from others and functions by itself, they are interdependent on each other and complementary to each other.

(4) Culture is human. Firstly, culture must be created by human activities, i.e. human products. A stone without human labor is not a cultural product. Traces left by animals on the land are not cultural phenomena. Only human is the creator of culture. It must be pointed out that culture is the collective products of a particular human community. Individual's ideas or behaviors are not culture until they are accepted by most of members in his community, but his speech and action do reflect the culture in which he lives. Secondly, culture is carried by human beings by means of language. (Further information will be given in the section Culture and Language). Thirdly, culture exerts influence on human activities. On the one hand, human creates culture; on the other hand, they are bound by their own products.

(5) Culture is unique and salient to its human community. Members of a cultural community have their own cultural identity or the identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has a shared system of symbols and meanings as well as norms for behaviors. The fact that we often judge a person by his appearance, movement, voice, clothes and other elements of culture is a perfect and familiar example. People without your cultural identity are "strangers" among you and your fellows in your cultural community.

1.2. Cultural Elements

As we have mentioned in the above section, culture is a multifaceted system consisting of many elements such as language and gestures, personal appearance, social relationships, religion, philosophy, and values, courtship, marriage, family customs, norms, etc. It is almost impossible for us to give a complete list of all the elements. A culture is a megasystem composed of many subsystems. Cultural anthropologists divide it into four big subsystems (Liu Yingkai, 1991: 564):

- (1) *technical-economic system.*
- (2) *social system including class, group, politics, law, education and customs.*
- (3) *social system including world outlook, religious belief, arts, values and thoughts.*
- (4) *language system.*

And they point out there are not obvious differences between cultures in the first system and differences are obvious in the latter three systems between different cultures.

Starting from the relationship between translation and culture, Eugene Nida (1964) holds a different attitude towards the division, he categorized culture into five parts: 1. ecological culture; 2. language culture; 3. religious culture; 4. material culture; 5. social culture.

This writer thinks the above divisions are not satisfactory. According to Marxist theory, science and technology are the products of human spiritual activities while economy falls into the category of material. Therefore, technology and economy should not be combined into one system. In addition, both system (2) and system (3) belong to the spiritual aspect of culture, it is unnecessary to divide them into two separate systems. Nida's view is obviously influenced by Christianity, he overemphasizes the place of religion in culture and parallels it with other subsystems of culture. Furthermore, ecological culture is a branch of material culture, there is no necessity to separate it from material culture. We hold the idea that culture consists of three major subsystems:

- (1). material culture, including all material products created by human beings such as food, clothes, houses and so on.
- (2). spiritual culture, including everything created by spiritual activities

such as science, technology, religion, belief, values, etc.

(3).language system

1.3. Language, Thought and Culture

To fully understand the relationship between language and culture, it is necessary to know the main relations between language and thought.

As for relationship between language and thought, there are main four schools:

1.3.1. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

German linguist Karl Wilhelm von Humboldt(1767-1835) argued that each language includes a particular world outlook of language. Under the influence of Humboldt, Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Lee Whorf developed a linguistic theory known as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, consisting of linguistic determinism (language determines thought) and linguistic relativity (there is no limit to the structural diversity of languages) (Hu Zhuanglin, et al, 1988: 240). When speaking of the role of language in culture, Sapir and Whorf held “ Language plays a large and significant role in the totality of culture. Far from being a technique of communication, it is itself a way of directing the perception of its speakers and it provides for them habitual models of analyzing experience into significant categories.”(Hoiyer, 1959: 94). The view of this school is well summarized by Fritz Mauthner “ If Aristotle had spoken Chinese or Dakota, his logic and his categories would have been different”.

1.3.2. The Cognitive Hypothesis

Jean Piaget put forward that cognition goes before language and thought determines language. Piaget came to this conclusion from the psychological perspective. Although he could not correctly show us the relationship between language and thought, he at least pointed out a new way to study the relationship between language and culture.

1.3.3. The Three-World View

K. Popper suggested that the whole world consist of three parts: the material, thought and language, and language is a very important objective concept that can describe the material world. Popper sees the importance of language in the system of culture and places it in an independent position. However, it is a regret he emphasizes the role and position of religion in the magasystem starting from his religious belief.

1.3.4. Language and Culture: a dialectical relationship

We are now in a position to discuss language and culture in a dialectical relationship. “... culture is certainly a significant part of our lives. Language is not only a distinctive feature of culture, it also distinguishes humans from animals and it's an absolutely indispensable means of transmitting culture from one generation to the next. Language is a model of culture.” (Nida, 1993). Culture is a system including language. And language is an important element in the system of culture. Culture and language are interdependent. On the one hand, language is the carrier of culture and the medium of reflecting, storing, recording and spreading culture in a certain sense. Language is the symbolic representation of a people and their historical and social backgrounds as well as their approaches and attitudes towards life and their ways of living and thinking when we consider language in the broad sense. On the other hand, culture exerts great influence on language. Culture influences how we adopt and learn languages, habits, rules, thoughts, behaviors and human relationships. In our daily communication, cultural imprints are subtle and elusive, if not beyond conscious recognition at times. Culture has such pervasive effect on language that sometimes inter-cultural communication can not go smoothly for cultural barriers or misinterpreting. Language and culture are so closely related that people make study of culture through comparing differences between languages.

Cultural difference may cause linguistic difference in each layer of language (in the field of sound, form and meaning). Let's analyze it one by one.

First, cultural gap may lead to referential gap, in other words, the lack

of signifier is caused by the lack of signified in the culture. In Chinese, we have these lexical items such as YinYang(阴阳), qigong (气功), erhu (二胡), but we can not find their equivalents in English for there are not these things in English culture.

Second, culture leaves deep marks on the meaning of linguistic units (words, phrases, sentences and even texts) or cultural gap may lead to semantic gap, "Language and culture are two symbolic system. Everything we say in language has some meanings, designative or sociative, denotative or connotative. Every language form we use has meanings, carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language. Language is only part of a culture"(Nida: 1993).For example, in English "rose" symbolizes "love", but in Chinese, we use "红豆" (love pea or red bean) for this meaning. Chinese people often associate the full moon with "reunion" or "happiness" and "homesickness", while these feelings (associative meanings) do not come to English people even when they watch the full bright moon on August 15.

Third, cultural differences cause structural differences in languages.

As we have discussed in the above, different Cultural modes have different correspondent modes of thinking and linguistic modes. In modern Chinese, we write the address on the envelope from big to small and often from left to right such as 中国福建厦门厦门大学(China Fujian, Xiamen, Xiamen University), while in English it should be written from small to big like this :Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian, China, and the first letter of each part of the address should be written in capitalization .Why is there this difference? It is due to the fact that people in old China were deeply influenced by the principle "There is government, when the prince is prince, and the son is son" (Confucius The Analects). The Confucian idea of hierarchy left deep marks on the modes of thinking in Chinese culture and is reflected in Chinese.

Fourth, the culture may lead to the conceptual difference. Linguists have pointed out that there is no one-to-one relationship between the signifier and the signified. In our real life, we may have this or that object and phenomenon, however, it is not necessary that we have its correspondent signifier. Lado thought the existence of a particular signifier in a language depends on whether the signified is so important in

the culture that people using the language feel it is essential to use a concept to reflect it in their language. For instance, all human beings experience sequences of fourteen days, but in some cultures like English, that period of time is culturally received as a block of talking about fourteen-day periods and used as a unit of time measurement, either exact or approximate. Chinese people also have fourteen-days in time, but we do not feel that this period of time is so important that it is considered as a concept. Consequently, the British people have a term “fortnight” for the purpose, and use it frequently while the Chinese people do not have a term for the concept, and when we need to talk about this period of time, we are likely to call them fourteen days or two weeks.

Fifth, cultural differences result in pragmatic differences. In two different languages, people can often find some “false friends”(linguistic units which are often misused for not understanding their delicate cultural differences).In almost all English-Chinese dictionaries, we can find that “father” is translated into “父亲”, not “爸爸” (its equivalent is dad or daddy).Does this mean that father and “父亲” have the same pragmatic function? Of course, the answer is unquestionably negative. In English, we use “father” and “mother” when addressing the people directly: “Can I borrow the car, father?” (LDOCE 2nd), while in Chinese, we do not use “父亲” when addressing our male parent directly, we use “爸爸” to replace it.

Sixth, each culture encourages a particular style of communication expected within each culture. Culture teaches and reinforces significant rules, rituals and values. As far as language is concerned, culture exerts great influence on intonation (stress, syllable, length and pitch), pattern (statement, question, imperative, exclamation), voice, formality, register, style and pause.

Seventh, culture can encourage or delay the development of a language.

Each culture encourages its language, which conforms to its standards and restricts those that are not “good” or “proper” according to its cultural standards. For example, after Norman conquest of England, French was encouraged and people speaking French were considered superior to those speaking English. This encouraged many British people to learn French, thus improving the development of French and laying a barrier in

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